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FRANCE

France's fourth ballistic missile submarine, the Indomptable, is ready to begin sea trials. According to the US defense attache in Paris, the initial tests of the nuclear-powered submarine will be conducted in the coastal waters off Cherbourg.

At the current rate of progress, the Indomptable should be ready to join the fleet in early 1977. It probably will be France's first submarine to carry a full load of sixteen M-20 missiles, which have a range of about 1,600 nautical miles and are armed with one-megaton thermonuclear warheads.

France currently plans to build six or seven ballistic missile submarines. Three already are operational, and the rest should be in service by the mid-1980s unless the budgetary squeeze forces Paris to slow development.

The defense attache also reported that the prototype reactor for France's first nuclear-powered attack submarine went critical in late November. The reactor now will be studied by naval propulsion specialists for its suitability in the planned class of 2,500-ton nuclear attack submarines.

Construction of the first submarine of this class has been delayed as a result of budget cuts already made. Consequently, the first of these boats now will not be operational until well into the 1980s.

Long-range plans still call for two squadrons of nuclear attack submarines in the 1980s. These probably will replace, rather than augment, some of the older, conventionally powered boats. [redacted]

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